

INTERROGATING THE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES MILITATING AGAINST THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIAN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Dr. Lysias Dodd Gilbert

Department of Political Science,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

Cognizant of Nigeria's quest for the consolidation of her nascent democratic experience, the teaching and learning of Government as an academic discipline is of great importance to the contemporary Nigerian society. The significance clearly transcends but includes, the inculcation of the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in Nigerian students (future leaders), exposing them to the dynamics of the Nigerian political system, engaging students in rigorous intellectual training and development, training of students in the art of constructive, sequential and objective analysis and presentation of facts with near scientific prediction and conclusion. In addition, are the facts that Government trains students in character development, exposes them to the dynamics of international relations and instills in them the much needed civic attitudes required for a free, democratic, just and egalitarian state. However, despite the importance of teaching and learning of the subject, there are numerous factors militating against it in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools. Against this backdrop, this paper reviews the factors militating against the effective teaching and learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools and concludes that the most critical of these problems are the non-availability of professionally trained teachers and relevant instructional materials peculiar to the subject.

Keywords: Fundamental, Government, Learning, Nigeria, Teaching

Introduction

Human societies have since time immemorial been particularly interested in how their younger generations are socialized and prepared for governmental, governance and citizenship roles. Consequently, specified

educational methods and programs aimed at educating people for such purposes have been devised and are being sustained and improved on by professionals throughout the world. At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited the British educational system and by extension, the teaching and learning of Government as an academic discipline. As a result, Government as a subject became an integral part of Nigeria's educational curriculum both at the secondary and tertiary levels. At the secondary school level, it is studied as a subject from Senior Secondary Class 1 (SS1) to Senior Secondary School Examination stage (SS3) and it is a requirement for the study of several courses such as, political science, international relations, economics, sociology, law, etc., in universities. While at the tertiary or university level, the discipline is studied as political science.

It is the importance placed on the teaching and learning of the subject matter of Government that has ensured the sustenance of the discipline in Nigerian secondary school curriculum since independence till date. Moreover, the emphasis on Government increased since 1999 due to Nigeria's current democratization process and her quest for the consolidation of this democratic experience as one that is characterized by political stability, equity, justice, good governance, continuity, institutionalism and palpable poverty reduction. However, despite the importance of teaching and learning of the subject, there are numerous factors inhibiting it in Nigerian secondary schools. Against this backdrop, this paper reviews the factors militating against the effective teaching and learning of Government in Nigerian secondary schools and concludes that the most critical of these problems are the non-availability of professionally trained teachers and relevant instructional materials peculiar to the subject.

Conceptual Clarifications

In this section, the basic concepts of teaching, learning and Government are explained within the context of this research paper as follows:

The Concept of Teaching

Prior to contemporary times, anyone that facilitated learning constituted a teacher. Today however, teaching involves more than mere impartation of knowledge because according to Penn (1987), knowledge of facts and other information is only a small part of what a teacher teaches. In addition to impartation of knowledge, a teacher is also involved in teaching learners to think logically, analytically, and creatively, and nurturing learners to the stage of being able to express themselves in speaking, writing and the development of communication skills. Furthermore, teachers train students to develop constructive, positive feelings and attitude about themselves and

others, build up social and manual skills and develop strong, coordinated and flexible physical body that can withstand rigorous academic experiences.

Therefore, teaching can be defined as "an act of interpersonal influence aimed at changing the ways in which other persons can or will behave"(Gage, 1963: 96). Similarly, Anderson and Burns (1989:8) described teaching as "an interpersonal interactive activity, typically involving verbal communication, which is undertaken for the purpose of helping one or more students learn or change the ways in which they can or will behave." It is a "conscious and deliberate effort aimed at changing the disposition of a particular person or persons by another person" (Gilbert, 2005: 120a). It thus entails any activity, which helps people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavioral patterns needed for the actualization of their personal and societal goals.

Clearly, teaching is a human function performed by an individual (a teacher) for another person (a learner) and those professionally trained to facilitate teaching are called teachers. They involve people in experiences that produce change in behavior. Thus, one might be engaged in a process of self-instruction through programmed materials, books or films but not the act of self-teaching because an individual cannot professionally claim that he has taught himself or herself (ibid).

Learning Explained

As stated earlier, learning goes hand in hand with teaching, hence the expression, "the teaching-learning process". Educationists and psychologists alike have variously defined the term learning. A few examples will suffice: Hilgard (1956: 3), defined it as "the process by which an activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of the change in activity cannot be explained on the basis of nature response tendencies, maturation, or temporary states of the organism." Kimble (1961, cited by Hergenhann & Olson 1997) also described learning as a relatively permanent change in behavioral potentiality that results from experience and cannot be attributed to temporary body states such as those induced by illness, fatigue or drugs. De Cecco (1968: 431) seems to agree with both Hilgard and Kimble when he defined learning as "a relatively permanent change in behavioral tendency which results from reinforced practice." Similarly, Marx (1971 cited by Chauhan, 1996:117) defined learning as "a relatively enduring change in behaviour which is a function of prior behaviour".

From the above definitions, it is clear that learning has to do with a relatively permanent change in behavior and although this change will not last forever but it will last for some time in the learner or learners involved. And these changes are not attributable to maturation, growth, development,

senescence (aging), drugs and inspiration. This implies that any acquired behavioral pattern that is not relatively permanent cannot be described as learning. In addition, according to Penn (1987), the word behavior is broadly used to include all types of human activities, both observable and non-observable in the lives of learners.

Secondly, the change in behavior occurs as a result of experience or practice. Experience here refers to any activity that results to change in behavior. It could be reading, observations, repetitions, study or involvement in any other activity for the acquisition of skills, knowledge or the development of our affective abilities.

Therefore, learning is a relatively permanent change in the behavior of a person or group of persons "ascribable to a conscious interaction between the teacher and the learners or between the learners and the learning experiences intended" (Gilbert, 2005: 120a). Interaction here imply both verbal and non-verbal communication. Learning involves training and constant practice, which leads to reinforcement. Thus, a good learner believes in rehearsals and practice, as this reinforces learning. In addition, learning is some change of enduring nature, which is expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is quite different from the kind of change that is attributable to nature. Rather, it is gradual and progressive, and leads to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. And the learner is also expected to be actively involved in his/her attempt to learn.

Government

Oyovbaire, Ogunna, Amuchaezi, Coker & Oshuntuyi (1991), Ibezim (1998) and Idoniboye-Obu & Gilbert (2004) are in agreement that the subject matter of Government can be interrogated from different closely interconnected perspectives. For example, as an institution of the state, government is an agency through which people organize their needs and capabilities for greater or ultimate good of everyone. It is in this context that Appadorai (1975: 3) stated thus, "Government are clothed with authority to make laws and enforce them; they claim obedience from members of the society whom they govern". Also, as an art of governing, it involves the process of policy initiation, formation and implementation. In this sense, it includes the sum total of the legislative, executive, administrative and juridical agencies and institutions of the state. Furthermore, Government also means knowledge and it is a recognized subject of study in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools. Therefore, our emphasis in this article is on Government as a subject, an academic discipline and a body of knowledge.

The Significance of Teaching and Learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools

Cognizant of Nigeria's quest for the consolidation of her nascent democratic experience, the teaching and learning of Government as an academic discipline in Nigerian senior secondary schools is basically of great importance to the contemporary Nigerian society. Due to the wide scope of government syllabus, the subject matter no doubt deals with a wide range of issues, which are of great relevance to the students and the society in general. For example, the appropriate teaching and learning of Government as a subject, facilitates suitable character development in students. Proper teaching of concepts such as citizenship, democracy, fundamental human rights, rule of law and nationalism accelerates the positive molding of students attitudes and character into responsible Nigerian citizens. In fact, the exemplary lives of freedom fighters, nationalist and world leaders are usually sources of emulation and inspiration to several students who perhaps, adopt some of them as role models and aspire to live as responsibly as such personalities.

The study of Government also provides rigorous intellectual training, which prepares students for higher education in courses such as law, political science, international relations and public administration. It contains facts, theories, concepts and methodology, which aids logic in thinking, critical thinking and rationalization. Students are therefore trained in the art of constructive, sequential and objective comprehension, analysis and presentation of facts with a near scientific prediction and conclusion. In addition, appropriate teaching and learning of the subject enhances the development of the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in students. Clear understanding of the workings of the various governmental institutions aids a better and more sympathetic appreciation of the socio-political situation of the country and this stimulates the growth of patriotic feelings and attitudes in students. Moreover, in Nigeria the Government curriculum is designed to rouse in students the love of country and an appreciation of his role as citizen by the inculcation of values of national consciousness, national unity and national integration (Idoniboye-Obu & Gilbert, 2004: 3).

Furthermore, the teaching and learning of the subject matter of Government facilitates the inculcation of civic attitudes in Nigerian students. Learners are taught vital civic attitudes required for a free democratic, just and egalitarian state. And this also engenders in them respect for the worth and dignity of their fellow citizens and better human relationships. Such attitudes as casting of votes, justice, obedience, legality, fair play, tolerance, love for fellow Nigerian citizens, humility, respect for law and order, fundamental human rights, rule of law and payment of taxes are essential for peace, stability and advancement of the Nigerian nation-state.

Another significance of Government is that it promotes the understanding of the dynamics of the Nigerian political system. The study of the subject by students, avails them a better understanding of their country's socio-political situation. It also exposes them to the sophisticated workings of their political system, thereby placing them in vantage positions to participate fully in the decision-making processes in their adult life. The teaching and learning of topics such as: organs of government, democracy, rule of law, political parties, pressure groups and the electoral process socialize learners politically and prepares them for political participation in the larger society. Moreover, sections 65, sub-section 1(a), 131(d) and 177(d) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stipulates that the basic qualification for legislative offices (Senate and House of Representatives), office of the president and governor respectively, is Senior School Certificate. By implication therefore, any graduate of Nigerian Senior Secondary School that adequately studied the subject matter of Government would have gone through some process of political socialization sufficient enough to facilitate his or her participation in the current democratic dispensation in the country.

Besides, the teaching and learning of Government expose students to international relations. By the inclusion of foreign policy and international organizations such as, United Nations Organization, Commonwealth of Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States in the syllabus, students are sufficiently exposed to Nigeria's role in such organizations and the membership benefits derivable from them. Students by the same token are taught the foreign policy objectives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria enunciated in section 19(a-e) of the Constitution. Therefore the effective study of the subject enable students to appreciate the interdependence of states in the international system, the objectives of Nigeria's interaction with other states and the value of world peace, mutual cooperation and tolerance to the continued existence and well being of their country and the world at large.

Interrogating the Fundamental Challenges Militating against the Effective Teaching and Learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools

However, despite the imperativeness and significance of the subject especially in this democratic dispensation, there are several factors inhibiting the effective teaching and learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools and these include the following: first, is the problem of non-availability of standard libraries containing Government textbooks in most public schools. A good number of government-owned secondary schools in Nigeria do not have functional libraries where prescribed

Government textbooks exist. Even where they exist, they are characteristically, poorly equipped and cannot sustain the effective study of the subject.

Related to this, is the problem of finding standard Government textbooks that covers all the recommended topics in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) syllabi for Senior School Certificate examination in Nigeria. Some of the available Government textbooks at best are summaries of the topics; their depth is shallow and does not measure to the standard required by both examination bodies. Besides, there is the problem of authorship of Government textbooks by non-specialists, which sometimes lead to outright misinformation or superficial and peripheral analysis and presentation of the subject matter. Moreover, the dynamism of the political systems (both national and international) makes it necessary for Government teachers to keep abreast with current developments (Gilbert, 2005b). The possibility of this becomes far-fetched due to the non-availability of up-to-date textbooks and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities. The teacher is always faced with the problem of where and how to get the relevant information he needs for effective teaching.

Similarly, most Government teachers are not properly trained. Unlike in the past when everyone who directs, explains, interacts and instructs a learner in such manner that makes him acquire new knowledge, was referred to as a teacher, today teaching has transcended this level.

Currently, a teacher is seen as one professionally trained to stimulate, guide, direct, instruct and encourage the learner towards the evolvement of a change in behavior. He is one who has acquired the basic and necessary professional skills that could be used in the process of teaching and learning to bring about change in the behavior of learners. Therefore, the acquisition of the basic skills necessary for the job is imperative before one can be described as a teacher. The level of professional training will determine the refinement and suitability of a teacher for the career. Teaching of Government requires a teacher that is versed in the subject matter and organization of appropriate readily accessible and easily identifiable resources for the individual learners need. The teacher professionally organizes, prepares, selects, stimulates, instructs, encourages and corrects the experiences and the interpretation of each student. This requires considerable skill, refined attitudes, wisdom, initiativeness and resourcefulness on the part of the teacher and most of these attributes that makes for professional effectiveness can only be acquired through proper teacher training.

The adoption of the 6-3-3-4 educational system in Nigeria requires that the minimum qualification for teaching classes at the Senior Secondary School level should be at least a Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed., B.Sc.

Ed. or B. A Ed.). However, where a teacher acquired a degree in other courses, he or she is required to also obtain a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to qualify as a professional teacher and educationist. The only exception is where the person in question had a National Certificate of Education (NCE) before obtaining subsequent degrees. Unfortunately, due to inadequate professionally trained teachers coupled with the high level of underemployment and unemployment in Nigeria, several untrained teachers (quacks) are employed to teach Government at the secondary school level. A lot of them have Bachelor of Science degree (B.Sc.) in political science but are not professionally trained educationists and teachers. The obvious implication is that they may be knowledgeable and have a grasp of the subject matter but may not possess the basic competence and skills to teach the subject effectively. And their inability to teach with appropriate methodology of instruction and adjust the content of the lesson to the level of the students constitute a fundamental challenge to the teaching and learning of Government.

Furthermore, the non-availability of resource centers and instructional materials is part of the basic problems militating against the effective teaching and learning of Government in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools. Resource centers are places where instructional materials of all types are stored, while instructional materials are resources used by teachers to make lessons clearer, meaningful and effective. These are non-existent in most Nigerian schools. Even simple and common instructional materials like atlas and political maps of the world are not available. This problem compels some Government teachers to depend on their meager resources for the improvisation of instructional materials, while others do not even bother. Consequently, the teaching of the subject becomes abstract, boring and uninteresting.

Additionally, the location of most senior secondary schools in rural settings in Nigeria is a problem to the teaching and learning of Government. For example, some topics in Government can only be effectively taught in urban centers where students can be led on excursion to observe practically, courts that are in session, the legislature in the process of deliberation, the Civil Service complex, etc. These institutions are not available in the rural areas where most secondary schools are located. Also, Government students in urban areas have more access to information agencies like, journals, magazines, newspapers, television, radio and internet which facilitate the teaching and learning of the subject than in the rural areas. This creates room for disparity between the rural and the urban students because one of the major determinants of learning is the environment in which learning takes place.

Another challenge is terminological in nature. Government has the problem of terminology. It is a subject noted for high sounding and jaw breaking conceptual words ending with 'isms'. Basic concepts as communalism, socialism, communism, capitalism, fascism, totalitarianism, feudalism, etc., can at times be confusing to students and thus, makes teaching and learning the subject lackluster. Finally, is the problem of personal orientational bias. Despite the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), which hitherto was the bastion of communism in the international system, the end of the Cold War, the dethronement of bipolarism, and consequent enthronement of Euro-American capitalistic unipolarism, socialist and communist ideologies still abound. Government teachers are thus faced with the problem of eliminating their personal orientational biases while teaching their students. This of course, affects the subject because it is no longer taught as objectively as expected.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Since one of the cardinal aspiration of the Nigerian state is the consolidation of her nascent democratic experience, it is therefore recommended that the state should lay emphasis on the effective teaching and learning of Government in Senior Secondary Schools. This to a great extent will help in the inculcation of democratic virtues and civic attitudes in our youngsters and eventually make for peace, stability, progress and national integration. However, this cannot be done without adequate availability of professionally trained teachers to handle the subject. Professionally trained teachers are usually conversant with the plurality of methods and techniques of teaching for easy facilitation of the teaching-learning process. They are also exposed to the psychology of students, sound communication and classroom management techniques for effective teaching and learning.

Be that as it may, notwithstanding how well trained a Government teacher may be, without the proper use of relevant instructional materials, he might find it difficult teaching effectively. Instructional materials are resources, aids and equipment used by Government teachers to facilitate the teaching-learning process. The teacher uses them because they help in effective communication of his lesson in minimum time with less effort, aid in the concretization of ideas, stimulation of students' imagination, illustration of concepts clearer and better than the teacher's explanation, facilitation of retention and recall and keeping of students busy and active, thus increasing their participation in lessons. Worthy of note is the fact that instructional materials are also referred to as learning resources, audio-visual aids, teaching aids, instructional resources, educational materials, curriculum materials and instructional objects. Though educationists may differ slightly

in their definitions, the most fundamental element that unites them lies in the fact that these materials (no matter the terminology) are all used to make teaching and learning more effective (Gilbert, 2005b).

In teaching of Government, teachers use visual materials, which appeals only to the sense of seeing such as, still pictures, maps, charts, diagrams, cartoons, illustrations, chalkboards, interactive boards, bulletin boards, posters, textbooks, magazines, newspapers and journals. They also use audio-materials; these are resources that are mostly used by listening. Their output could be increased or decreased in volume. For effective use of these materials a noise-free environment is required. Examples include: radio, tape recorders, radio cassettes, compact disc (CD), etc. In the same vein, audio-visual equipment like, television, video compact disc (VCD), motion pictures, cinema, film projectors, power point productions from computers, etc., are used by teachers as instructional materials. These are materials, which students can hear and see - they stimulate both ears and eyes simultaneously. But surprisingly, in spite of the value of these instructional materials for the effective teaching and learning of Government, they are barely available in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools.

In fact after a critical review of the factors militating against the effective teaching and learning of Government based on extant literature, interviews granted by teachers and students of Government from senior secondary schools, personal interactions with several teaching practice students and personal observation as a professionally trained educationist, it was concluded that non-availability of professionally trained Government teachers and instructional materials are the most fundamental challenges militating against the teaching and learning of the subject.. Therefore, it is also recommended that the three-tiers of government in Nigeria (federal, state and local) should consciously create enabling environments and motivate the professional training of Government teachers for posting to our senior secondary schools. Furthermore, it is strongly suggested that adequate efforts should be geared towards the provision of suitable instructional materials for the teachers because these assist in making learning more durable and plays a long-term part in sustaining interest and attracting students to continue with the subject.

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